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ABSTRACT

Suffolk Community College Eastern Campus (SCCEC) designed and implemented a retention program built on the belief that access for students does not necessarily lead to success. The goal of the retention program was to increase retention of students by providing them with the skills and supports necessary to succeed. The group targeted for the retention program was the entire general college population, with special emphasis placed on those students at highest risk. Focusing on students' integration into campus life, the program included orientation, freshman seminar classes, academic advising, training and workshops for faculty and other key personnel, and universal testing. Universal testing, which accounted for the largest program expense, allowed for early identification of students with academic deficiencies, and proper placement of students into developmental courses. Enrollment and retention figures were constantly reviewed to help chart the success of the retention program. The retention rate for entering students still enrolled after one semester increased after the program was implemented in 1986 (i.e., from 73.3% in September 1986, to 78.8% in February 1987 and 88.9% in September 1988). Analyses of the initial enrollment questionnaire revealed that 39.9% of the student body was under 20 years of age; 46.7% took a full-time course load of 12 credits or more; 45% reported that they were attending college for job preparation, while 55.3% entered with the objective of receiving a certificate or degree; and 42.5% worked between 21 and 40 hours per week. Analyses showed a post-1987 increase in satisfactory completions of developmental courses. (JMC)

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SUFFOLK COMMUNITY COLLEGE

E.C.R.P.

EASTERN CAMPUS RETENTION PROGRAM

1991

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Descriptive Manuscript.....

Description of Retention Program..... 3

Development of the Program..... 3

Specific Goals and Objectives..... 10

Results and Outcomes..... 12

Use of Resources..... 13

Potential for Adaptation..... 14

Suffolk County Community College is a comprehensive multi campus institution with locations in Brentwood, Selden and Riverhead, Long Island, New York. The Eastern Campus is located on a 192 acre site near Riverhead, Long Island and contains three academic and two auxiliary buildings. The Marine Science Center is located on a 50 acre site with one academic building. The Eastern Campus opened its doors in 1977 to join the other two campuses of Suffolk Community College. Today our total enrollment is about 2,600 students and approximately 1800 FTE's. Our full-time enrollment is approximately 46% of the total student body. The campus has comprehensive programs in the Liberal Arts, Accounting and Business, Fine Arts (Graphic and Interior Design), Hospitality (Hotel, Restaurant, Travel and Tourism) Allied Health (Diet Tech), Science and Technology (Science Lab Tech, Horticulture and Science) and Criminal Justice (which includes the Suffolk County Police Academy). Although all three campus have made great strides in their retention efforts, the Eastern Campuses has been the pioneer for the college in the area of retention.

The Eastern Campus has taken the retention effort a step further than the other campuses and as a result has experienced an increase in retention which is greater than the significant increases in retention experienced by the other two campuses. Since the Eastern Campus has to date developed the most comprehensive model and experienced the greatest increase in its retention, we feel the Eastern Campus deserves to be recognized for its accomplishments and is, therefore, the focus of this application.

A. DESCRIPTION OF RETENTION PROGRAM

Suffolk Community College Eastern Campus has successfully designed and implemented an effective retention program. This program is built on the belief that access for students does not necessarily lead to success. As a community college, we have developed numerous ways of affording members of the community access to our college. We have made the same effort in this past decade to afford our students the opportunity for both access to our college as well as success. This multi-faceted program is woven into many aspects of a students college experience, and is designed to improve the retention of the general college population. The College's retention program currently includes the following: training of key personnel, orientation, Universal Testing, Academic Advisement, Freshman Seminar, Developmental courses, Honors courses, Faculty Workshops, Early Warning, Early Notification, Lyceum Studies, Prerequisite Blocks, College Skills Center, curriculum and course development and revision, course offerings, Coop/Internships and Exit Interviews, Program Review, and Outcomes Assessment.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM

The designing and implementing of an effective retention program is a process that goes through many phases. The College first explored the topic of retention by answering two key questions: What do we mean by "retention?" and Why is retention an issue?

To answer the first question, we immediately find there is no simple way of defining retention. Retention can mean keeping students until they graduate or it can be defined as keeping our students until they meet their educational goals. The second is perhaps a more accurate definition while simultaneously more difficult to answer. It of course assumes we know what each students educational goals are, that they remain relatively constant or any change can be monitored. While graduation rates are a less accurate measure of retention, it is more easily quantified. Yet another way to explore retention is to look at semester-to-semester retention rates and individual student tracking over several years.

If we explore the second question, why is retention an issue, we see its importance in offering each student an opportunity for academic success as well as maintaining enrollment. Retention is directly correlated to such things as faculty lines, budget, class schedules and a list of other important concerns. There are only two basic ways to maintain enrollment; maintaining our current student population and new student recruitment. If we look at new student recruitment, we find in most areas nationally the high school population has leveled off or is in decline. Most new categories of potential students have already been explored and are currently providing a way to maintain enrollment or provide only modest temporary increases.

So, how do we maximize our retention effort in order to reduce the amount of new recruiting that must be done while simultaneously affording our students the opportunity not only for access, but for success?

Many things must be done to accomplish this task. We all know how important first impressions are in every aspect of life. This phenomenon holds true for institutions as well. Retention begins with the students first contact with the institution. We must realize that often the admissions officer is the second or third person to come in contact with a perspective student. Often, even before personal contact the perspective candidate comes in contact with our literature, brochures, catalogs and other items which help to create a campus image. Students need to feel connected, they need to feel a part of, they need to be integrated into campus life. Perhaps Durkheim put it best in his discussion of suicide. "People are less likely to commit suicide the greater their social involvement." Students are less likely to commit academic suicide the greater their campus involvement.

There are many pieces that are a part of the retention puzzle and student involvement in college life. When developing our program, we looked at the whole puzzle and then addressed each of the pieces individually. Different aspects of the program were introduced until our program was completed. Although all areas are included and the "goal"

has been reached, the program undergoes reviewing and revising to check and chart its effectiveness.

At the onset of a students' integration into campus life, we focus on their orientation, Freshman Seminar classes, training and workshops for faculty and other key personnel who have initial contact with new students, and Universal Testing.

Orientation for all students is carried out by the Director of Student Activities, Dean of Students and the Office of Instruction.

Training sessions are scheduled each semester for faculty and personnel. Emphasis is placed on training for the Freshman Seminar course and is built around the text "Becoming a Master Student" by David Ellis. Using this text as a base has helped the College develop a course that uncovers the basic tools needed for a students success. Topics directly related to a students academic performance include time management, note taking, reading, testing and resources. Money, health and relationships, topics which affect the students personnel and academic life and choices are also included. The catalog describes Freshman Seminar as a course "designed to present methods and techniques which students can adopt to promote their perseverance and success at the College. Specific topics to be included will be college procedures and resources, academic advisement, time management, goal-setting, test and note taking, health issues and other areas related to student success in college." This

one-credit course is required for graduation for all full-time day students. Freshman Seminar was incorporated into students schedules on the Eastern Campus in Spring 1987 and on Ammerman and Western Campus in Fall of 1987.

Universal testing was instituted in 1987 and gave us a tool for identifying those students at highest risk.

Once the student is an active member of the S.C.C. community, the networking continues and in fact expands throughout our programs.

Academic advisement is available for all students, full-time or part-time. An advisor is assigned to each matriculated student at the time of registration. The counseling office is open both day and evenings; advisors, career counselors, learning disability specialists are valuable resources available to our students.

The college skills center is open daily for use by all students. However, students enrolled in developmental courses have scheduled hours in the skills center. In addition, these students are encouraged to make use of the skills center on a regular basis, not just when having difficulty. Tutoring is available for all students through the college skills center. Subject areas included regularly are accounting, business, math, criminology, reading, social science and writing. Tutors in other subjects are made available upon request.

Developmental courses help students improve the skills necessary for successful completion of required content area

courses.

The above average student may find the added stimulation and challenge of the Honors Program to be a most valuable part of the retention program. Faculty members can recommend qualified students for Honors courses which can lead to an honors degree. For admission into an honors section students need a 3.2 cumulative GPA and a B+ or better in EG11, or a faculty recommendation and an academic review by the honors committee.

Early Warning and Early Notification Program were initiated by the Dean of Instruction to identify potential student problems early in the semester. This encourages faculty to evaluate students and intervene early in the semester.

Course prerequisites have been a regular part of Suffolk's course offerings for many years. When courses are introduced the curriculum committee scrutinizes the skills necessary for a student to be successful in any proposed course. As a result, prerequisites have been difficult to enforce. However, in 1988 prerequisite blocks were computerized. These computer blocks prevent students from enrolling in courses that they are not prepared for, again, maximizing their chances of success. These course prerequisites are periodically reviewed and constantly under revision.

Since 1986 Coop/internships have been offered in academic and career areas, including, Business, Graphic

Design, Travel and Tourism, Restaurant and Hotel Management, Political Science, Women's Studies, Interior Design, Horticulture, Broadcast Communications, Paralegal and Marine Science. Coop/internship opportunities provide students with "hands on" experience in the area they are pursuing. these programs benefit the students academically, professionally as well as financially. In surveys conducted by the college to non-returning students, financial reasons were frequently stated as being the reason for leaving the college. These programs assist in addressing this need. In the Fall of 1990 the Eastern Campus was successful in securing a Cooperative Education Grant. This grant will mean about a half million dollars over five-years and has allowed us to hire a full-time coop director, coordinator and secretary. We have also hired faculty to work on curriculum development in Cooperative Education during the summer of 1991. It is also in our plans to hire an additional coordinator beginning in September 1991 to expand the program to the other campuses.

Lyceum studies is a thematic lecture program offered on the Eastern Campus for student enrichment and personal interest. Themes in the past have included Our Environment and the First Amendment. The purpose of this course is to award one unit of academic credit to students who attend various Lyceum events during a semester and demonstrate that they have gained knowledge about the thematic topics. This is a one-credit course open to all students, and may be

repeated any number of times for Liberal Arts Credit. Lyceum events are scheduled throughout the semester. Students enrolled in Lyceum Studies will have the additional requirement of reading a book related to the Lyceum events. They will have the opportunity to attend one or more discussions of that book and will be required to write a paper, due at the end of the semester, integrating thematically the various Lyceum experiences of the semester.

The puzzle for each individual is completed with exit interviews conducted by counseling or the registrars office. Students withdrawing from a course from the college without completion of a certificate or a degree are required to complete a questionnaire stating the reason for withdrawing. The results of these interviews are recorded and maintained in the students academic file.

C. SPECIFIC GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RETENTION PROGRAM

The specific goal of the retention program was to increase retention of students by providing them with the skills and supports necessary to succeed. The group targeted for this retention program was/is the entire general college population with special emphasis on those students at highest risk. Since historically a large percentage of students are lost early in the first semester of college, early identification of students with academic deficiencies is essential to their success. These students were identified through the Universal Testing Program which was instituted in

January 1987 on the Eastern Campus. Prior to this (1987), students were tested in Reading, Math, and English classes without mandatory placement. The results were used by counseling to encourage students to take basic courses. However, the tests were administered to students enrolled in basic reading, math or english courses. Through the instituting of Universal Testing, all matriculated students were tested. (A study of non matriculated students found that their use of counseling and course selection process was relatively accurate. Non matriculated students tended to be older, more mature, less confident in their prior knowledge thus more likely to take or repeat prerequisites and usually more motivated. We then used the Universal Testing scores in combination with other standardized test scores in the students high school record to institute mandatory placement in developmental courses when necessary.) This resulted in eliminating the loss of some students that "fell through the cracks". Each campus offers a program that provides intensive assistance to help students prepare for college course work. Soon after the students are admitted and assigned a matriculated status, they are contacted to arrange a time to take the computerized Placement Tests required of all newly admitted full and part-time matriculated students. These tests were developed to determine what level of course work is appropriate for new students college-level or some level of developmental studies. Students transferring from another college who can demonstrate they have successfully

completed the appropriate college-level courses may have the placement test requirement waived. The developmental program may lengthen the time required to complete a degree.

While in the developmental program students may enroll in no more than 14 hours/credits and make changes in courses only after written approval by the Office of Instruction or the Counseling Office at the Eastern Campus. The developmental program provides a wide range of support services including individual counseling and advisement. In addition, there is a college skills center which offers faculty and peer tutoring in reading, writing, and mathematics. Financial assistance is also provided to students meeting specific criteria of need who otherwise might not be able to attend college. The Eastern Campus has followed the theory that "time on task" is an important ingredient in building basic skills. We have added a recitation hour to our developmental classes. Students Level 1 Developmental classes take Math, Reading, and English for four (4) hours each for a total of twelve (12) hours.

The general college population is addressed throughout our program in all the areas previously mentioned.

D. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS AND THE INSTITUTION

The college is continuously reviewing the figures that help chart the success of our retention program and ultimately, our students.

We can compare figures that point to student success and improved retention, enrollment for the institution.

Studying the before and after effects of the retention program will show the increase in the number of students which remain enrolled after one semester. (The highest percentage of students drop out after one semester.)

The chart below compares percent of students remaining after one semester of college.

Eastern Campus Persistence Rate

Semester Entering	Total No. Entering*	No. of Students Remaining After One Semester	Percent Remaining
2/85	146	106	72.6%
9/85	411	295	71.8%
2/86	151	113	74.8%
9/86	470	345	73.4%
**			
2/87	198	156	78.8%
9/87	368	307	83.4%
2/88	104	101	97.1%
9/88	506	450	88.9%

Figures are rounded to the nearest tenth

* Higher No. entering in fall semester

**Start of Universal Testing

E. USE OF RESOURCES

Our retention program has been implemented within the college's budget.

The largest expense resulting from the incorporation of this program was due to the Universal Testing. It was determined that the testing fee, to cover tests, proctoring

and scoring would be twenty dollars per student. This fee is included in the student's tuition and fees package as a placement testing fee.

Due to the institution's interest in making retention a priority, funds have been shifted to cover the additional expenses created by this program. Training sessions and workshops, orientation, academic advisement, the developmental program, College Skills Center and tutoring, Early Warning and Notification and Honors Programs are all included in the annual budget. These services have become standard at the college.

The college has examined other possibilities, such as additional workshops and an expanded mentoring program, but cannot increase the budget at this point in time.

F. POTENTIAL FOR ADAPTATION BY OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The program we have instituted for retention of our students could be easily adapted by other institutions. Modifications could be made to meet the needs of the individual college. We presently use the computer version of the New Jersey Basic Skills Test which has been computerized for our use. Our program affords other institutions the possibility of adapting those segments which would be most beneficial and best fit their needs.

Since the preparation of our initial descriptive manuscript, we have been analyzing the data collected from our initial enrollment data entry questionnaire and grade distribution reports. This has helped us to answer two

additional questions. 1) Who attends the Eastern Campus of Suffolk Community College and 2) Have the changes instituted in our developmental courses made any significant difference in student performance.

By analyzing our initial enrollment data entry forms which contained over 5,600 cases the following profile of our student body emerged. When we look at age, we found that 39.9% of our student body was under age 20, that is traditional freshman and sophomore college age students. In addition, the following age cohorts were as follows:

Ages 20 - 24 = 19.4%, Ages 25-29 = 11.6%

Ages 30 - 39 = 17.4%, Ages 40-59 = 10.5% and

over 60 = 1.2%.

We found that 46.7% of our students took a full-time course load of 12 credits or more. Most of those who attend full-time were under 20, attended during the day and planned to transfer. Those students who attended evenings, were those who attend to improve their job skills and those who attend for personal interest tended to take four or less credits a semester. This normally would translate into one course at a time. It was also most interesting to find that 45% of our students reported their reason for attending as "job preparation", while 22% attend with the objective of transferring to another institution. We also found that only 55.3% entered with the objective of receiving a certificate or a degree. It is also noteworthy to mention that 42.5% of our students work between 21 and 40 hours/week. When we

consider that only 55.3% enter with the objective of completing a degree or certificate, and although 22% plan to transfer, we found no correlation between those who plan to graduate and those who plan to transfer. Therefore, our retention statistics become even more significant if we begin with the premise that 22% plan to transfer often after the completion of one semester and only 55.3% ever intended to get a degree or certificate. It is our hope to expand upon this segment of the analysis and determine the actual percentage of those students who persist until they have accomplished their intended goals. We are also interested in examining the question as to whether our efforts have encouraged the quest for higher education and have caused student goals and self expectations to increase.

The second part of our current analysis was to look at student performance in our developmental courses since the addition of the recitation hour. This change was implemented to allow students more "time on task" while simultaneously allowing a developmental student to attend full-time without being required to take a content area course. After looking at pre and post test data, we were able to determine a significant increase in post test results after the addition of the recitation hour in 1987. However, we were also interested in an analysis of course performance. The following chart prepared by our campus director of Institutional Services shows a post 1987 increase in

satisfactory grade completions. In EG10 Developmental English the increased performance was significant at the .001 level.

RE10 Reading in the Content Areas
Grades Broken-down by Year. Chi Square = 14.68, p. <.05

Year	F		D		C or Above		Total
	N	Row %	N	Row %	N	Row %	
1986	3	12.0%	4	16.0%	18	72.0%	25
1987	5	8.77%	9	15.8%	43	75.4%	57
1988	8	6.15%	11	8.46%	111	85.38%	130
1989	7	4.39%	6	3.75%	147	91.88%	160

EG10 Developmental Writing
Grades Broken-down by Year. Chi Square = 28.63, p. <.001

Year	U		R		S		Total
	N	Row %	N	Row %	N	Row %	
1986	5	16.0%	1	3.2%	25	80.6%	31
1987	3	5.01%	12	20.3%	44	74.6%	59
1988	5	4.85%	1	.97%	97	94.2%	103
1989	9	8.57%	6	5.7%	90	85.7%	105

MA01 Developmental Mathematics Skills
Grades Broken-down by Year. Chi Square = 17.56, p. <.01

Year	U		R		S		Total
	N	Row %	N	Row %	N	Row %	
1986	2	9.5%	7	33.3%	12	57.1%	21
1987	6	18.2%	6	18.2%	21	63.6%	33
1988	1	2.6%	3	7.9%	34	89.5%	38
1989	1	2.5%	4	10.0%	35	87.5%	40

MA05 Algebra I
Grades Broken-down by Year. Chi Square = 11.73, p. <.06

Year	U		R		S		Total
	N	Row %	N	Row %	N	Row %	
1986	10	22.2%	10	22.2%	25	55.6%	45
1987	12	22.6%	5	9.4%	36	67.9%	53
1988	10	13.0%	9	11.7%	58	75.3%	77
1989	5	7.5%	10	14.9%	52	77.6%	67

It is our hope to continue to analyze the data collected in an effort to answer many of the yet unanswered questions. We will continue to refine our retention program as our goal is to give students every possible chance at academic success.

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